

Hepatitis C and Injection Drug Use

TRYING TO BE HEP C FREE

What is hepatitis C?

Hep C is a virus that attacks the liver. It is different from other kinds of hepatitis.

- There is no vaccine to prevent Hep C.
- Without medicine, most people with Hep C will have it forever and can pass it to others through blood.
- People with Hep C may feel healthy for many years, but over time Hep C causes liver damage and can cause cancer and death.

How is hepatitis C passed between users?

Hep C is spread by contact with blood, even amounts you can't see. This often happens when people share needles, syringes, spoons, cookers, prep/rinse water, or anything used to tie off.

Can hepatitis C be passed in other ways?

Hep C can also be passed when:

- Getting tattoos or piercings in non-licensed places or with non-sterile equipment.
- During birth (uncommon) if the mother has Hep C.
- Sharing items like toothbrushes, nail clippers, or razors that have blood on them.
- Having sex (rare), especially when someone has HIV, has sex with lots of people, or has rough sex.
- People had blood transfusions or organ transplants before 1992.

How can I protect myself?

- Only use NEW needles and syringes EVERY time. Buy them at pharmacies or get them at needle exchange programs. You can find a list at www.Mass.gov/HepC.
- Find out about drug and alcohol treatment programs if you are ready to stop using. You can get information at www.HelplineMA.org.
- Only get tattoos or body piercings at places using sterile equipment and supplies.
- Only use your own razors, toothbrush, or nail clippers.
- Use a condom for anal or vaginal sex.

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Should I get a hepatitis C test?

If you have ever injected, even once, get tested.

- A blood test is used to look for Hep C. Sometimes more than one test is needed.
- If you don't have a doctor, you can get tested at a needle exchange or community testing program. You can find one at www.Mass.gov/HepC.

Whether or not I have Hep C, how can I take care of my liver?

- Avoid alcohol altogether or drink as little as possible.
- Don't take medications or vitamins without checking with your doctor.
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

Can hepatitis C be cured?

- There are new medicines that can cure hepatitis C infection. These pills only need to be taken for a few months and have fewer side-effects than old Hep C medicines. Your doctor can explain more about your options.
- Getting cured of Hep C does NOT protect someone from getting infected again.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse, or health care clinic.
- Needle Exchange Programs – find a list at www.Mass.gov/HepC.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.
- Your local board of health (listed in the telephone directory under “government”).
- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) at 888-658-2850 or 617-983-6800.
- Drug and alcohol treatment programs – find a list at www.HelplineMA.org or 800-327-5050.



Find out more at Mass.gov/HepC

Massachusetts Department of Public Health | Bureau of Infectious Disease and Laboratory Sciences